

VLR-6/20/72 NRHP-3/1/73

Form 10-300
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: VIRGINIA	
COUNTY: HAMPTON (in city)	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	3/1/73

1. NAME

COMMON:
OLD POINT COMFORT LIGHTHOUSE

AND/OR HISTORIC:
OLD POINT COMFORT LIGHTHOUSE

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
Fenwick Road, .2 mi. SW of east gate, Fort Monroe.

CITY OR TOWN:
Hampton (Thomas N. Downing, First District Congressman)

STATE: Virginia CODE: 51 COUNTY: (in city) CODE: 650

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
U.S. GOVERNMENT

STREET AND NUMBER:
U. S. COAST Guard, Fifth Coast Guard District, Federal Building

CITY OR TOWN: Portsmouth STATE: Virginia CODE: 51

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:
Clerk of Court

STREET AND NUMBER:
City of Hampton

CITY OR TOWN: Hampton STATE: Virginia CODE: 51

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey

DATE OF SURVEY: 1972 Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

STREET AND NUMBER:
Room 1116, Ninth Street State Office Building

CITY OR TOWN: Richmond STATE: Virginia CODE: 51

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: VIRGINIA
COUNTY: HAMPTON (in city)
ENTRY NUMBER
DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The light tower stands on the southern edge of Old Point Comfort, a peninsula that marks the north side of the entrance to Hampton Roads Harbor. This neck of land, originally labeled "Cape Comfort" by Christopher Newport's explorers in 1607, provided a protective barrier for the old port of Hampton.

When the present lighthouse was constructed in 1802, there was little else at Old Point Comfort but the ruins of a colonial defense work, Fort George. In a short time, however, the massive Fort Monroe rose just behind the tower, its embankment and moat within a hundred feet of the structure. Southwest of the tower is Engineer's Wharf, where Jefferson Davis was brought ashore in 1865 to begin his four and one-half month imprisonment at Fort Monroe.

The tapered octagonal ashlar stone lighthouse retains its original appearance, although the light mechanism has been changed several times. Stone moldings at the base and top add architectural finish to the tower. Two windows on each of two opposite sides light the stone spiral stair, which is approached by a door at the ground level on the west side. The winding stair is constructed similarly to those found in medieval European buildings, with the outer end of each wedge-shaped step being keyed into the wall. The inner ends of the steps are rounded to form the continuous central post around which the stair winds. The tread of each step is finely finished, while the under surface is roughly formed.

The structure maintains a fresh appearance due to regular white-washing of the stoneworks.

The lightkeeper's house, constructed beside the tower circa 1900, is a two story frame structure with shingle and horizontal board siding, second story overhang, and exposed frame decoration of the gables. The front gable is further elaborated with a sunburst motif. The scale of the house emphasizes the small size of the tower, which is forty-seven feet from base to focal point of the light.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian | 16th Century | 18th Century | 20th Century
 15th Century | 17th Century | 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Phi- | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | losophy | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Human- | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | itarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Virginia colony lost its chief coast fortification when Fort George at Old Point Comfort was destroyed by the disastrous hurricane of 1749. The second half of the century saw no rebuilding of the fortifications, and in 1774 John Dames was employed as caretaker of the ruins. Tradition has it that Dames overcame his boredom by operating a light that guided ships entering Hampton Roads. The Assembly recognized the importance of this new enterprise, and in 1775 Dames was voted a yearly salary of twenty pounds to continue maintaining the light until a permanent structure could be built.

Whether Dames' temporary operation was continued during the Revolution is not known, but in an act dated January 2, 1798, the Virginia Legislature authorized the conveyance of land at Old Point Comfort to the Federal Government for the purpose of erecting a lighthouse. In April of that year Congress approved an act directing the Secretary of the Treasury to contract to have the light built. The present structure was completed in 1802, seventeen years before the Government began construction of Fort Monroe. Following the completion of Fort Monroe it was thought that the lighthouse should be incorporated into the Fort's structure, for a Congressional act of 1837 approved the expenditure of \$6000 "for removing the light-house at Old Point Comfort into Fortress Monroe." The move was never made, however.

The Old Point Comfort Lighthouse was held by Federal forces during the War Between the States, and it was just offshore that the clash between the ironclads Monitor and Virginia took place on March 9, 1862.

Unlike its abandoned twin, New Point Comfort Lighthouse in Mathews County, erected in 1802, the Old Point Comfort Lighthouse remains in excellent condition and still functions as a round-the-clock nautical aid.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Arthur, Robert, History of Fort Monroe. Fort Monroe, Va.: Coast Artillery, 1930.

Holland, Francis R., America's Lighthouses. Brattleboro, Vt.: Stephen Green Press, 1972, p. 118.

Laws of the United States Relating to the Establishment, Support, & Management of Light-houses, 1789-1855. Washington: A.O.P. Nicholson, 1855.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		37° 00' 06"	76° 18' 25"	
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **Less than 10 acres**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

ORGANIZATION: Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission DATE: June, 1972

STREET AND NUMBER:
Room 1116, Ninth Street State Office Building

CITY OR TOWN: Richmond STATE: Virginia CODE: 51

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National State Local

Name _____

James W. Moody, Jr., Director

Title Va. Historic Landmarks Commission

Date 6/20/72

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

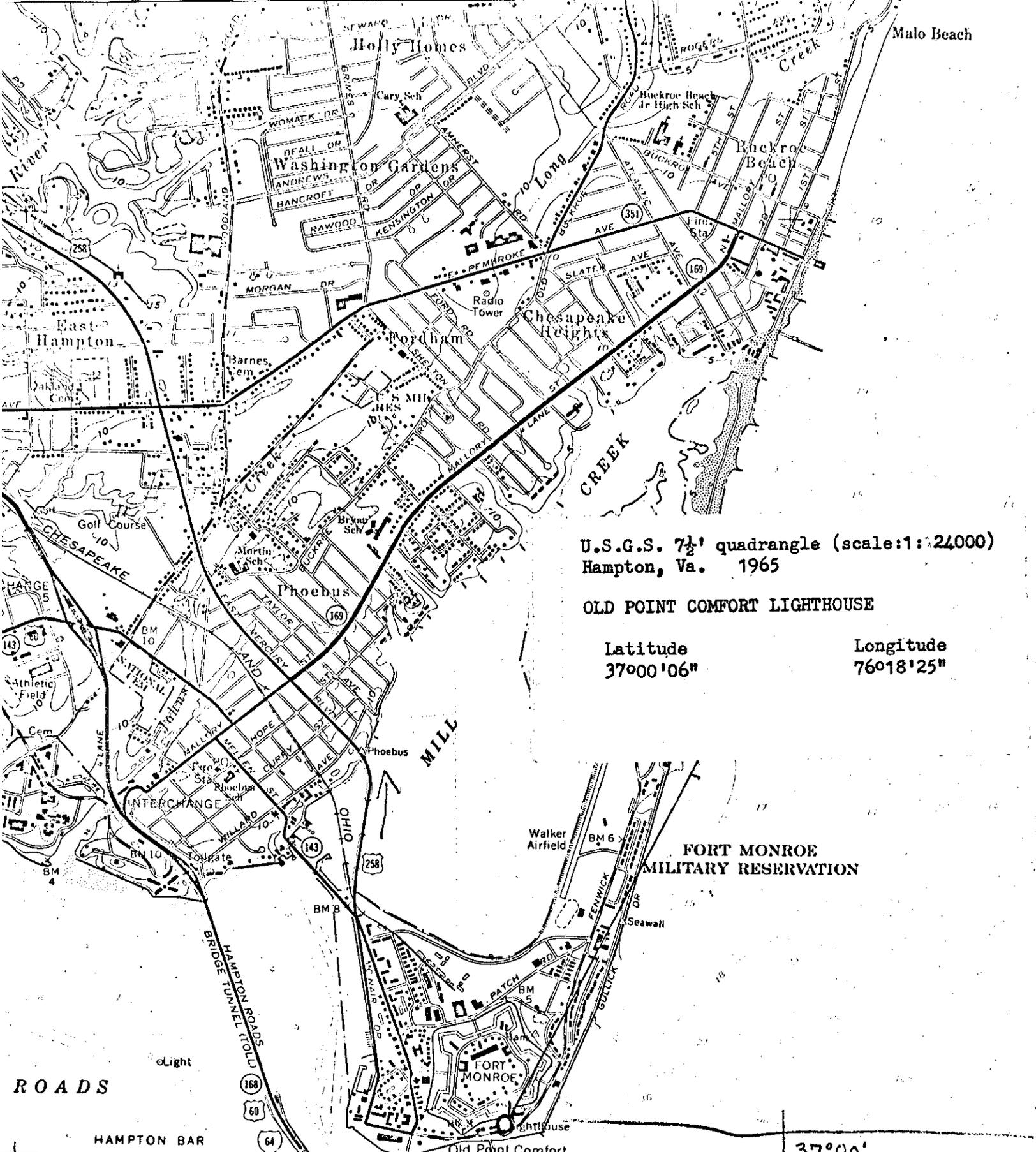
Date _____

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date 3/1/73

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



Malo Beach

U.S.G.S. 7 1/2' quadrangle (scale:1:24,000)
Hampton, Va. 1965

OLD POINT COMFORT LIGHTHOUSE

Latitude
37°00'06"

Longitude
76°18'25"

FORT MONROE
MILITARY RESERVATION

ROADS

HAMPTON BAR

Old Point Comfort

37°00'

382 NORFOLK (U.S. 460) 6 MI.
VIRGINIA BEACH 26 MI.

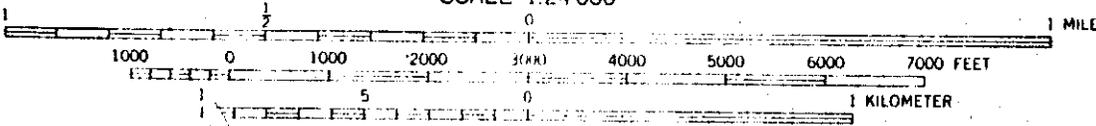
(NORFOLK NORTH)
5757 IV NE

384

76°17'30"

386000m E.

SCALE 1:24 000



CONTOUR INTERVAL 5 FEET
DATUM IS MEAN SEA LEVEL

DEPTH CURVES AND SOUNDINGS IN FEET—DATUM IS MEAN LOW WATER